

OTTO JESPERSEN

Notes on Metre

Otto Jespersen was perhaps the most prodigiously talented of modern linguists. No writer on the subject of language displayed such vast knowledge, theoretical subtlety, and logical clarity. Gifted with a fabulously sensitive ear that could discern any variety of stress and pause, he was uniquely equipped to hear the meters of English poetry.

In this brief essay—almost schematic in its organization—Jespersen establishes the rules of English iambic meter. These rules also operate in the iambic verse of German and Scandinavian poets. He clears away the numerous fallacies and lays the “conceptual ghosts” (John Hollander’s phrase) that have prevented any accurate understanding of the structural principles of English meter. He discards the inappropriate terminology of longs and shorts, and the macron (—) and breve (◡) of classical prosody; he points out that we will understand “the chief irregularities of blank verse” only if we speak of “positions” rather than feet; and, in anticipation of Trager and Smith, suggests that while “in reality there are infinite gradations of stress,” for the purposes of metrical analysis we need only recognize four degrees. ‘Metricity’ is a function of the relative stress between syllables; corollary to this principle is “that syllables which ought

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seemingly to be strong are weakened if occurring between strong syllables, and naturally weak syllables gain in strength if placed between weak syllables."

We can hear the operation of the rule of relative stress in this line:

The course of true love never did run smooth.

Because *love* is positioned between two strongly stressed syllables (*true* and *nev-*), it loses strength and becomes metrically weak. "It is the relative stress that counts."

Jespersen proposes a notation of scansion that is adopted by Halle and Keyser (q.v.). The paradigm for the iambic line may be illustrated by the "symbol string"

aB aB aB aB aB (a).

This becomes Halle and Keyser's

WS WS WS WS WS WS (W).

A. Walter Bernhart notes ("Generative Metrics," *Poetics* 12, April 1974), "as studies in modern linguistics tend ultimately to go back to Saussure, studies in modern metrics are generally based on Jespersen. . . ."

1. The iambic pentameter may without any exaggeration be termed the most important metre of all in the literatures of the North-European world. Since Chaucer used it in its rimed form (the heroic line) and especially since Marlowe made it popular in the drama in its unrimed form (blank verse), it has been employed by Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, Cowper, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Tennyson, by Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller, as well as by numerous Scandinavian poets, in a great many of their most important works. I shall here try to analyse some peculiarities of this metre, but my remarks are directly applicable to other metres as well and indirectly should bear on the whole metrical science, which, if I am right in the theories advanced below, would seem to require a fundamental revision of its principles, system of notation, and nomenclature.

According to the traditional notation the metre mentioned above consists of five iambs with or without an eleventh weak syllable:

υ — | υ — | υ — | υ — | υ — | υ

Her eyes, | her haire, | her cheeke, | her gate, | her voice. (1)

Give ev' | ry man | thine ear', | but few | thy voyce: | (2)

Take each | mans cen | sure, but | reserve | thy judg' | ment. (3)

Ein un | nütz Le | ben ist | ein früh | er Tod. (4)

Zufrie | den wär' | ich, wenn | mein Volk | mich rühm | te.¹ (5)

without intermission would be intolerably monotonous and that therefore a trochee here and there serves to introduce the pleasing effect of variety.² But there are several objections to this view. In the first place even a long series of perfectly regular lines is not disagreeably monotonous if written by a real poet. In one of Shakespeare's finest scenes we find in the first hundred lines not more than four inversions (*As You Like It*, II, 7); it can hardly be those four lines which make the whole scene so pleasing to the ear. In Valborg's speech in Oehlenschläger's *Axel og Valborg*, III, 69, we have twenty-eight beautiful lines without a single deviation from the iambic scheme.

Secondly, if harmony were due to such irregularities, it would be natural to expect the same effect from similar deviations in trochaic and other metres. The reader of Longfellow's *Hiawatha* no doubt feels its metre as much more monotonous than the five-foot iambus, yet here no deviations would be tolerated; an iambus in a trochaic metre is an unwelcome intruder, while a trochee in an iambic line is hailed as a friendly guest.

Thirdly, the theory gives no explanation of the fact that the use of trochees is subject to some limitations; if the only purpose were to relieve monotony, one would expect trochees to be equally welcome everywhere in iambic verses, but that is very far from being the case. True, the rare occurrence of trochees in the fifth foot is explained by saying that deviations from the ordinary pattern are always best tolerated in the beginning of the verse, because then there is still time to return to the regular movement. But if this were the only reason, we should expect trochees to tend to decrease as we approached the end of the line, the second foot presenting more instances than the third, and the third than the fourth; but this again does not tally with the actual facts, for the second foot has fewer inversions than any other foot except the fifth. König gives the following numbers for Shakespeare:

first foot more than	3000
second foot only	34
third foot more than	500
fourth foot more than	400. ³

4. If we are to arrive at a real understanding of the metre in question and of modern metre in general, it will be necessary to revise many of the current ideas which may be traced back to ancient metrists, and to look at the facts as they present themselves to the unsophisticated ears of modern poets and modern readers. The chief fallacies that it is to my mind important to get rid of are the following:

(1) *The fallacy of longs and shorts.* Modern verses are based primarily not on length (duration), but on stress (intensity). In analysing them we should

therefore avoid such signs as — and ∪, and further get rid of such terms as iambus (∪ —), trochee (— ∪), dactylus (— ∪ ∪), anapaest (∪ ∪ —), pyrrhic (∪ ∪), choriamb (— ∪ ∪ —), etc. To speak of an iambus and interpret the term as a foot consisting of one weak and one strong syllable is not quite so harmless a thing as to speak of consuls and mean something different from the old Roman consules. It is not merely a question of nomenclature: the old names will tend to make us take over more than the terms of the old metrists. There are other misleading terms: what some call "arsis" is by others termed "thesis", and inversely.

(2) *The fallacy of the foot*, i.e. the analysis of a line as consisting of parts divided off by means of perpendicular straight lines ∪ — | ∪ — | ∪ — | etc. Such signs of separation can only delude the reader into "scanning" lines with artificial pauses between the feet—often in the middle of words and in other most unnatural places. On the other hand a natural pause, occasioned by a break in the meaning, may be found in the middle of a foot as well as between metrical feet. It is also often arbitrary where we put the division-mark: Are we to scan Tennyson's line

The de | light of | happy | laughter

or

The delight | of hap | py laugh | ter?

The line mentioned above (1, 1) is analysed by E. K. (now Sir Edmund) Chambers in his Warwick edition of *Macbeth* as having "the stress inverted in every foot" and a dactylus in the first:

Told' by an | i' diot, | full' of | sound' and | fu' ry.

Some metrists (Bayfield among them) even incline to treat such lines as 1.3 as "trochaic" with an anacrusis:

Take | each mans | censure, | but re | serve thy | judg' ment.

In such cases it would almost seem as if the vertical stroke were used as the bar in music, to indicate where the strong note or stress begins, though most metrists would deny the legitimacy of that analogy.

We shall see below that the abolition of the fallacy of the foot will assist us in understanding the chief irregularities of blank verse.

(3) *The fallacy of two grades*. The ancients recognized only longs and shorts though there are really many gradations of length of syllables. In the same way most of the moderns, while recognizing that stress is the most important thing in modern metres, speak of two grades only, calling every-

thing weak that is not strong. But in reality there are infinite gradations of stress, from the most penetrating scream to the faintest whisper; but in most instances it will be sufficient for our purposes to recognize four degrees which we may simply designate by the first four numbers:

- 4 strong
- 3 half-strong
- 2 half-weak
- 1 weak.

It is not always easy to apply these numbers to actually occurring syllables, and it is particularly difficult in many instances to distinguish between 3 and 2. Unfortunately we have no means of measuring stress objectively by instruments; we have nothing to go by except our ears; but then it is a kind of consolation that the poets themselves, whose lines we try to analyse, have been guided by nothing else but *their* ears—and after all, the human ear is a wonderfully delicate apparatus.

5. Verse rhythm is based on the same alternation between stronger and weaker syllables as that found in natural everyday speech. Even in the most prosaic speech, which is in no way dictated by artistic feeling, this alternation is not completely irregular: everywhere we observe a natural tendency towards making a weak syllable follow after a strong one and inversely. Rhythm very often makes itself felt in spite of what might be expected from the natural (logical or emotional) value of the words. Thus syllables which ought seemingly to be strong are weakened if occurring between strong syllables, and naturally weak syllables gain in strength if placed between weak syllables. *Uphill* is 24 in *to walk uphill*, but 42 in *an uphill walk*. *Good-natured* is 44, but becomes 43 or 42 in *a good-natured man*. The last syllable of *afternoon* is strong (4) in *this afternoon*, but weaker (2 or 3) in *afternoon tea*. *Back* is weaker in *he came back tired* than in *he came back with sore feet*, etc.

Illustrations of this principle are found in the following verse lines in which the middle one of the three italicized syllables is weakened, giving 434 (or 424) instead of 444:

- But *poore old man*, thou prun'st a rotten tree. (1)
- The course of *true love never* did run smooth. (2)
- Oh that his *too too solid* flesh would melt. (3)
- You are my ghests: do me no *foule play, friends*. (4)
- The *still sad music* of humanity. (5)

A long street climbs to one tall-tower'd mill. (6)

Doch sein geschwungner Arm traf ihre Brust (*ihre* emphatic). (7)

6. Of two successive weak syllables that one is the relatively stronger which is the further removed from the strongly stressed syllable; consequently we have the formula 412 in *happily, gossiping, lexicon, apricot, Socrates*, etc., and the inverse 214 (or 314) in *condescend, supersede, disinter*; 2141 in *collocation, expectation, intermixture*, 21412 in *conversational, international, regularity*.

The effect of surroundings is seen clearly in the following line, where *when one* is 23 after the strong *know*, and 32 before the strong *lives*:

I know when one is dead, and when one lives. (1)

Other examples (*I, and, when*—now "weak", now "strong" without regard to meaning) are found in the passage analysed below in 24. *It is* according to circumstances may be 12 or 21, and the same is true of *into* in Shakespeare and other poets. *Is* is "strong", i.e. 2, between two weak syllables (1) in

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever—

and any page of poetry affords examples of the same phenomenon.

7. Our ear does not really perceive stress relations with any degree of certainty except when the syllables concerned are contiguous. If two syllables are separated by a series of other syllables, it is extremely difficult even for the expert to tell which of them is the stronger, as one will feel when comparing the syllables of such a long word as *incomprehensibility*: *bil* is the strongest, *ben* is stronger than both *pre* and *si*, but what is the relation between *ben* and *com*? or between *in* and *ty*? Another similar word is *irresponsibility*, only here the first syllable is stronger than the second. What is decisive when words have to be used in verse is everywhere the surroundings: the metrical value of a syllable depends on what comes before and what follows after it.

Even more important is the fact that we have to do with *relative degrees of force only*: a sequence of syllables, a verse line may produce exactly the same metrical impression whether I pronounce it so softly that it can scarcely be heard at two feet's distance, or shout it so loudly that it can be distinctly perceived by everyone in a large theatre; but the strongest syllables in the former case may have been weaker than the very weakest ones in the latter case.

8. This leads us to another important principle: the effect of a *pause*: If I hear a syllable after a pause it is absolutely impossible for me to know

whether it is meant by the speaker as a strong or as a weak syllable: I have nothing to compare it with till I hear what follows. And it is extremely difficult to say with any degree of certainty what is the reciprocal relation between two syllables separated by a not too short pause.

9. Let us now try to apply these principles to the "iambic pentameter." The pattern expected by the hearer is a sequence of ten syllables (which may be followed by an eleventh, weak syllable), arranged in such a way that the syllables occupying the even places are raised by their force above the surrounding syllables. It is not possible to say that the scheme is

14 14 14 14 14 (1)

for this is a rare and not particularly admired form, as in

Her eyes, her haire, her cheeke, her gate, her voice. (1)

Of hairs, or straws, or dirt, or grubs, or worms. (2)

Lines of that type were pretty numerous in the earliest days of blank verse, in *Gorboduc* and in *Peele*. But it was soon felt that it was much more satisfactory to make the difference in force between the strong and the weak elements of the line less than that between 1 and 4 and at the same time less uniform, for the only thing required by the ear is an upward and a downward movement, a rise and a fall, an ascent and a descent, at fixed places, whereas it is of no importance whatever how great is the ascent or the descent. It is therefore possible to arrange the scheme in this way, denoting the odd syllables by *a* and the even ones by *b*:

$a/b \setminus a/b \setminus a/b \setminus a/b \setminus a/b \setminus a \sim$

or, if we denote relative strength by a capital,

$a B a B a B a B a B (a).$

10. It is the relative stress that counts. This is shown conclusively when we find that a syllable with stress-degree 2 counts as strong between two 1s, though it is in reality weaker than another with degree 3 which fills a weak place in the same line because it happens to stand between two 4s. This is, for instance, the case in

The course of true love never did run smooth. (1)

did (2) occupies a strong place though no sensible reader would make it as strong as *love*, which counts as weak in the verse.

In consequence of this relativity it is possible on the one hand to find lines with many weak syllables, e.g.

It is a nipping and an eager ayre. (2)

Here *is* and *and* on account of the surroundings are made into 2s; the line contains not a single consonant and only two long vowels.

On the other hand there are lines with many strong and long syllables, such as

And ten low words oft creep in one dull line. (3)

The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. (4)

Thoughts blacke, hands apt, drugges fit, and time agreeing. (5)

Day, night, houre, tide, time, worke, and play. (6)

Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death. (7)

In lines like the last two, however, the pauses make the regular alternation of 3 and 4 difficult or even impossible.

With inversion in the beginning we have Browning's dreadfully heavy

Spark-like mid unearthed slope-side figtree-roots. (8)

A comparison of such extremes of light and heavy lines shows conclusively that *quantity as such has no essential importance in the building up of blank verse.*

The principle of relativity allows an abundance of variety; there are many possible harmonious and easy-flowing verses, with five, or four, or three really strong syllables (degree 4); and the variety can be further increased by means of pauses, which may be found between the lines or at almost any place in the lines themselves, whether between or in the middle of so-called feet.

So much for the normal "iambic pentameter".

11. Let us now analyse a line with inversion, e.g.

Peace, children, peace! the king doth love you well. (1)

The stress numbers for the first four syllables are 4314 (or possibly 4214, though 3 seems more likely than 2 for the second syllable). Here the ear is not disappointed in the first syllable: after the pause preceding the line one does not know what general level to expect: a syllable which objectively is pretty strong might turn out to be a relatively weak introduction to something still stronger. A mathematician might feel tempted to express this in the following way: the proportion between the 0 of the pause and the 4 of a strong syllable is the same as between 0 and the 1 of a weak syllable.

It is therefore not till this strong syllable is followed by one that is weaker instead of stronger that the ear experiences a disappointment and feels

a deviation from the regular pattern. But the transition from the second to the third syllable is a descent in strict conformity with the pattern; and in the same way there is perfect regularity in the relation between the third and the (strong) fourth, and indeed in the whole of the rest of the line. The scheme accordingly is the following:

$$a \setminus b \setminus a / b \setminus a / b \setminus a / b \setminus a / b,$$

which should be compared with the scheme given above, 9, as normal.

This amounts to saying that while according to the traditional way of notation one would think that the departure from the norm concerned two-tenths (one-fifth) of the line if one heard a "trochee" instead of an "iambus", the ear is really disappointed at one only out of ten places. The deviation from the norm is thus reduced to one-tenth—or even less than that, because the descent is only a small one. The greater the descent, the greater also the dissatisfaction, but in the example analysed the descent was only from 4 to 3. A beginning 4114 is comparatively poor, but 4314 or 4214 does not sound bad, for from the second syllable (or from the transition to the third) one has the feeling that everything is all right and the movement is the usual one. In the case of two inversions in the same line we have in two places (not in four!) disappointments, each of them amounting to less than one-tenth, and so far separated from the other that they do not act jointly on the ear.

12. We shall now collect some classified examples which tend to show that poets have instinctively followed this hitherto never formulated principle.

A. First we have instances in which the three syllables concerned belong to the same word. Such words, of the stress-formula 431 or 421, are very frequent in Danish and German; I have therefore been able to find a great many lines like the following:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| Sandhedens kilder i dets bund udstrømme. | (1) |
| Staldbroder! hav tålmodighed med Axel. | (2) |
| Granvoxne Valborg!—Elskelige svend! | (3) |
| Kraftvolles mark war seiner söhn' und enkel. | (4) |
| Unedel sind die waffen eines weibes. | (5) |
| Hilfreiche götter vom Olympus rufen. | (6) |

In English, on the other hand, words of this type are comparatively rare, and in Elizabethan times there was a strong tendency to shift the stress rhythmically so as to have 412 instead of 431 or 421; thus *torchbearer*, *quicksilver*, *bedfellow*, etc. But we have 431 in

- Sleek-headed men, and such as sleepe a-nights. (7)
 Grim-visag'd warre hath smooth'd his wrinkled front. (8)
 All-seeing heaven, what a world is this? (9)

13. B. The first two syllables form one word.

- Doomesday is neere, dye all, dye merrily. (1)
 Welcome, Sir Walter Blunt, and would to God . . . (2)
 England did never owe so sweet a hope. (3)
 Something that hath a reference to my state. (4)
 Nothing that I respect, my gracious lord. (5)
 Ofspring of Heav'n and Earth, and all Earths Lord. (6)
 Noontide repast, or Afternoons repose. (7)

This is frequent in Danish:

- Valborg skal vorde Axel Thordsøns brud. (8)
 Alting er muligt for er trofast hjerte. (9)

14. C. The first word is one syllable, the second two or more.

- Urge neither charity nor shame to me. (1)
 Dye neyther mother, wife, nor Englands queene! (2)
 Peace, master marquesse, you are malapert. (3)
 Peace, children, peace! the king doth love you well. (4)
 First, madam, I intreate true peace of you. (5)

Danish and German examples:

- Tak, højfader, for din miskundhed! (6)
 Spar dine ord! Jeg kender ikke frygt. (7)
 Den baere kronen som er kronen voxen. (8)
 Frei atmen macht das leben nicht allein. (9)
 Sie rettet weder hoffnung, weder furcht. (10)

In cases like the following one may hesitate which of the first two syllables to make 4 and which 3:

- Yong, valiant, wise, and (no doubt) right royal. (11)
 Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. (12)
 Foule wrinkled witch, what mak'st thou in my sight? (13)
 Ros, rygte, folkesnak i sold den ta'er. (14)
 Rat, mässigung und weisheit und geduld. (15)

15. D. Two monosyllables.

Here there will naturally be a great many cases in which the correct distribution of stresses is not self-evident: one reader will stress the first and another the second word. I think, however, that in the following lines most readers will agree with me in stressing 4314 or 4214 (or 5314):

- Long may'st thou live, to wayle thy childrens' death. (1)
 Greefe fils the roome up of my absent childe. (2)
 God will revenge it. Come, lords, will you go. (3)
Their woes are parcell'd, mine is generall. (4)
 Sweet are the uses of adversitie. (5)
 Lye there what hidden womans feare there will. (6)
 Cours'd one another downe his innocent nose. (7)
 Knap var det sagt, så stod for dem den tykke. (8)
 Klog mand foragter ej sin stærke fjende. (9)
 Dank habt ihr stets. Doch nicht den reinen dank. (10)
 Wohl dem, der seiner väter gern gedenkt. (11)

In the middle of a line:

- As it is wonne with blood, *lost be it* so. (12)
 Den nordiske natur. *Alt skal du* skue. (13)
 So kehr zurück! *Thu, was dein* Herz dich heisst. (14)

16. While in the lines examined so far a natural reading will stress the second syllable more than the third, it must be admitted that there are many lines in which the words themselves do not demand this way of stressing. Nevertheless the possibility exists that the poet had it in his mind, and expert elocutionists will often unconsciously give a stronger stress to the second syllable just to minimize the deviation from the scheme and avoid the unpleasant effect of the sequence 4114. I think this is quite natural in cases like the following, in which a proper name or another important word calls for an emphatic enunciation which makes the second syllable stronger than it might have been in easy-going prose:

- Clarence* still breathes; *Edward* still lives and raignes. (1)
Never came poyson from so sweet a place. (2)
Never hung poyson on a fowler toade. (3)
Tyrants themselves wept when it was reported. (4)
 Hakon er konge, Valborg er en mø. (5)
 Himlen er ej så blå som disse blomster. (6)

Even in a line like

Cowards dye many times before their deaths (7)

an actor may feel inclined to express his contempt and to point the contrast to the following words—"The valiant never taste of death but once"—by giving special stress (53 or 54) to *cowards* and by extra stress on *many* to weigh down *die* to something comparatively insignificant, which is all the more natural as the idea of death has been mentioned in the preceding lines, while *cowards* is a new idea: new ideas are well known to attract strong stress. It is worth noting how often the figure is used as a rhetorical device to emphasize a contrast, in exclamations and in personal apostrophe (cf. König, p. 78). It is particularly apt for this use because a forcible attack of the voice after a pause will immediately catch the attention, before the verse settles down in its usual even course.

17. In spite of all this there will remain some instances in which the second syllable cannot easily be made stronger than the third. Metrics is no exact science aiming at finding out natural laws that are valid everywhere. All we can say is that by arranging syllables in such and such a way the poet will produce a pleasing effect; but of course a poet is free to sacrifice euphony if other things appear more important to him—not to mention the possibility that he is momentarily unable to hit upon anything more felicitous.

18. In all the cases dealt with in the preceding paragraphs there was a pause immediately before the strong syllable which had taken the place of a weak. The pause is often, but of course not everywhere, indicated by a full stop or other punctuation mark. A natural explanation of the varying frequency of inversion at different places in the line (see above 3) is found in the fact that a pause is not equally natural at all places. In the vast majority of cases inversion is found at the very beginning of a line, because the end of the preceding line is more often than not marked by a break in the thought, and even where this is not the case a reciter or actor will often make a pause between two lines. Not quite so frequently comes a pause and inversion in the middle of a line, after the second or third "foot". It is necessarily rarer after the first foot, because a division of the line into two such unequal parts (2 + 8 syllables) is not natural: the two syllables are awkwardly isolated and cut off from organic cohesion with the rest. This is even more true of a pause after the eighth syllable: a strong syllable here will not leave us time enough to regain the natural swing of the verse before the line is ended. In such a case as

It is his Highnesse pleasure, that the Queene
 Appeare in person here in Court. Silence! (1)

it would not even be unnatural to shout out the two last syllables as 44 or 45.

19. In yet another way a pause may play an important role in the verse. If we analyse the following lines in the usual way we find that the syllables here italicized form trochees where we should expect iambs, and if we read them without stopping they are felt to be inharmonious:

- Like to a step-*dame*, or a dowager. (1)
 Lye at the proud *foote* of a conqueror. (2)
 As wilde-*geese*, *that* the creeping fowler eye. (3)
 And let the soule *forth that* adoreth thee. (4)
 To bear the file's *tooth and* the hammer's tap. (5)
 John of the Black *Bands with* the upright spear. (6)
 A snow-*flake, and* a scanty couch of snow
 Crusted the grass-*walk and* the garden-mould. (7)
 Den, der er blind*født el*ler blind fra barndom. (8)
 Nu, det var smukt *gjort, det* var vel gjort, godt gjort. (9)
 Denn ihr allein *wisst, was* uns frommen kann. (10)

If, on the other hand, we read these lines with the pause required (or allowed) by the meaning, the ear will not be offended in the least. The line is in perfect order, because in the first place *dame* with its 3 is heard together with *step* (4) and thus shows a descent in the right place, and secondly *or* with its 2 is heard in close connexion with *a* (1), so that we have the required descent between these two syllables. Graphically:

Like to	a step-	dame, or	a dow	ager	
.....	iamb	trochee	iamb	
.....	1 4	3 2	1 4	
.....	a / b	\ a (\) b \	a / b	

The descent marked in parenthesis between *dame* and *or* is not heard, and is thus non-existent. Similarly in the other examples.⁴

20. The phenomena dealt with here (in 12 ff. and 19) are singularly fit to demonstrate the shortcomings of traditional metrics (cf. above 4). In the first case (inversion after a pause) we had a "trochee", whose second syllable acts in connexion with the first syllable of the following foot, as if the latter had been the second syllable of an iambus. In the second case (19) we had a "trochee" whose first syllable as a matter of fact will be perceived in the verse as if it were the first part of an iambus, and whose second syllable is similarly playing the role of the latter part of an iambus, and yet it is impossible to call these two successive iambic syllables a real iambus. In both cases the ear thus protests against the paper idea of a "foot". In the former case the perpen-

dicular line | is made to separate the two syllables whose mutual relation is really of great rhythmic importance and which accordingly ought to go together. In the latter case two similar straight lines join together syllables which are not to be heard together, and whose relation to one another is therefore of no consequence, while the syllables that have to be weighed against one another are by the same means separated as if they did not concern one another. Could anything be more absurd?

21. The irregularities in lines like

And they shall be one Flesh, one Heart, one Soule. (1)

The wretched animall heav'd forth such groanes (2)

might be explained by means of a pause after *be* and *animal: shall be* is 12, and *one flesh* 34, and similarly *animal* is 412 and *heav'd forth* 34, but the irregular 'ascent between 2 and 3 is concealed by the pause:

1 / 2 (/) 3 / 4 or a / b (/) a / b.

This explanation does not, however, hold good for numerous groups of a similar structure, e. g.:

In the sweet pangs of it remember me. (3)

And the free maides that weave their thred with bones. (4)

In the deepe bosome of the ocean buried. (5)

But the queenes kindred and night-walking heralds. (6)

Of the young prince your sonne: send straight for him. (7)

I will feede fat the ancient grudge I beare him. (8)

As his wise mother wrought in his behalfe. (9)

Of a strange nature is the sute you follow. (10)

Whose homes *are the dim caves* of human thought. (11)

The ploughman lost his sweat, *and the greene corne*. (12)

Did I deserve no more *then a fooles head?* (13)

This figure is frequent in English verse, but not in other languages. I incline to read it with 1234 and thus to say that the ascent is normal between the first and the second as well as between the third and the fourth syllable, so that there is only the one small anomaly of a slight ascent instead of a descent between the second and the third syllable. It is worth noting how frequently this figure contains an adjective (stressed 3) before a substantive (stressed 4); *fooles* before *head* is equivalent to an adjective.

Some metrists here speak of a double iambus (∪ ∪ — —). Robert Bridges (*Milton's Prosody*, 1894, p. 56) calls it "a foot of two unstressed short syllables preceding a foot composed of two heavy syllables" and says, "Whatever the

account of it is, it is pleasant to the ear even in the smoothest verse, and is so, no doubt, by a kind of compensation in it".

22. The role of a pause which covers and hides away metrical irregularities is seen also in the case of extra-metrical syllables. In Shakespeare these are particularly frequent where a line is distributed between two speakers. The pause makes us forget how far we had come: one speaker's words are heard as the regular beginning, and the next speaker's as the regular ending of a verse, and we do not feel that we have been treated to too much, though this would not pass equally unnoticed if there had been no break. Examples may be found in any book on Shakespeare's verse;⁵ one occurs in the passage of Henry IV analysed below (24, line 33). An interesting use of an extra-metrical syllable is made in King Lear IV, 1, 72

(Let the superfluous . . . man . . . that will not see.)
Because he do's not feele, feele your power quickly:

the second *feel*, which is necessary for the meaning, is heard as a kind of echo of the first and therefore enters into its place in the line.

23. There is one phenomenon which is even more curious than those mentioned so far, namely that which Abbott has termed *amphibious section*. Recent metrists do not as a rule acknowledge it, but its reality seems indisputable. It will not be found in poets who write for the eye, but Shakespeare was thinking of the stage only and was not interested in the way his plays would look when they were printed. He could therefore indulge in sequences like the following:

He but usurpt his life. | Beare them from hence. | Our
present businesse | is generall woe. | Friends of my soule, you
twaine | Rule in this realme | and the gor'd state sustaine. (1)

This is a sequence of 6 + 4 + 6 + 4 + 6 + 4 + 6 syllables, and in all the places here marked | (except perhaps two) a pause is necessary; after *life* a new speaker begins. The audience will not be able to notice that anything is missing: they will hear the first 6 + 4 as a full line, but the same four syllables go together with the following six to form another full line, and so on. A modern editor is in a difficult dilemma, for whichever way he prints the passage one line is sure to be too short:

He but usurped his life. Bear them from hence.
Our present business is general woe.
Friends of my soul, you twain
Rule in this realm and the gored state sustain.

Or

He but usurped his life.
 Bear them from hence. Our present business
 Is general, etc.

A second example is:

Utter your gravitie ore a gossips bowles,	
For here we need it not. — You are too hot.	6 + 4
Gods bread! it makes me mad. (2)	6

Or

For here we need it not.—	6
You are too hot. Gods bread! it makes me mad.	4 + 6

And a third:

Who, I, my lord! We know each others faces,	
But for our hearts, he knowes no more of mine	4 + 6
Then I of yours;	4
Nor I no more of his, ⁶ then you of mine.	6 + 4
Lord Hastings, you and he are neere in love. (3)	6 + 4

Such passages are thus elaborate acoustic delusions which are not detected on account of the intervening pauses.

24. It may not be amiss here to give the analysis of a connected long passage according to the principles advocated in this paper. The passage (*Henry IV*, A, I, 3, 22 ff.) is metrically of unusual interest.

- 29 My liege, I did deny no prisoners.
 30 But I remember when the fight was done,
 When I was dry with rage and extreame toyle,
 Breathlesse and faint, leaning upon my sword,
 Came there a certain lord, neat and trimly drest,
 34 Fresh as a bride-groome, and his chin new reapt
 Shew'd like a stubble land at harvest-home.
 He was perfumed like a milliner,
 And 'twixt his finger and his thumbe he held
 38 A pouncet-box, which ever and anon
 He gave his nose, and took't away againe:
 Who therewith angry, when it next came there,
 Tooke it in snuffe: and still he smil'd and talk'd:

- 42 And as the souldiers bare dead bodies by,
 He call'd them untaught knaves, unmannerly,
 To bring a slovenly unhandsome coarse
 45 Betwixt the wind and his nobility.

Line 29. *I* in weak position, but in 30 and 31 in strong position (2) on account of the surroundings, 9. Similarly *when* strong (2) in line 30, but degree 1 in line 31.

Line 31. *Extream* with rhythmic stress on *ex-* on account of its position before a strongly stressed word (see A. Schmidt, *Sb-Lex.*, II, p. 1413; my *Modern English Grammar*, I, 5. 53 f.; above 5). In the same way *untaught* line 43, but *unmannerly* and *unhandsome* with weak *un*.

Line 32. Two examples of inversion, 13.

Line 33. Which of the two words, *Came there*, is the stronger may be doubtful, 15. *Neat* an extra-metrical syllable, which is not felt as such on account of the pause, 22.

Line 34. Beginning inversion according to 15. *Groome* 3, *and* 2, with pause between them, 19; *new* 3 between two 4's, 5.

Line 35. *Showed like* inversion, 15.

Line 36. *Was* 2, stronger than *be* and *per-*. *Perfumed* 141. This is the ordinary stressing of the verb; also in our times; but in *Henry IV*, B, III, 1, 12, we have rhythmic shifting 41 before 4: "Then in the perfum'd chambers of the great". *Like* 2, as in preceding line.

Line 37. First *and* 1, second *and* 2 between weak syllables, 6. The two following *ands* also 2; this is likewise the case with *when* in line 40.

Line 41. Inversion, 17.

Line 42. *As* 2, 6, but *dead* 3 or 2 between strong syllables, 5.

Line 43. *untaught*, see above.

Line 44. *slovenly* 412 or perhaps 413 before *un-*, 6.

Line 45. *his* 2 or 3, probably not emphatic.

25. We have not yet offered an answer to the question raised in 2: why is a trochee among iambs easier to tolerate than inversely an iamb among trochees? But the answer is not difficult on the principles we have followed throughout. Take some trochaic lines, e.g.:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
 Life is but an empty dream

and substitute for the second line something like

A life's but an empty dream,

or

To live's but an empty dream.

The rhythm is completely spoilt. Or try instead of

Then the little Hiawatha
Learned of every bird its language

to say

The sweet little Hiawatha
Acquired every sound and language.

(Every of course in two syllables as in Longfellow).

In such cases with 14 instead of 41 we have the disagreeable clash of two strong syllables; further, we have two disappointments per line. It is true that if we pronounced the first strong syllable weaker than the second, thus made the whole 1341, we should have only one disappointment: a/b/a\b instead of the regular a\b/a\b; but it will be extremely hard to find examples of the sequence 34 as regularly occurring in any of the cognate languages. We shall see in the next paragraph the reason why 34 is not found within one and the same word; and when a word of the formula 14 is placed before a strongly stressed word, it is not generally reduced to 13, as the ordinary tendency in such cases is rather to substitute for it 31 or 21. See many examples from English in my *Modern English Grammar*, I, 156 ff.: "The other upon Saturn's bended neck" (Keats), "Protracted among endless solitudes" (Wordsworth), "a spirit without spot" (Shelley), "in forlorn servitude" (Wordsworth). For Danish examples, see *Modersmålets fonetik*, p. 139. The disinclination to "invert" in trochaic rhythms is thus seen to be deeply rooted in linguistic habits and in the phonetic structure of our languages.

26. What is the essential difference between a rising and a falling rhythm? (Or, in the old terms, between an "iambic" or "anapaestic" rhythm on the one hand and a "trochaic" or "dactylic" rhythm on the other?) Some writers minimize this difference and say that they are virtually identical, as the "anacrusis" has no real importance; instead of the sequence 14 14 14 . . . (∪—|∪—|∪—| . . .) they would write 1 41 41 41 . . ., (∪|—∪|—∪|— . . .). According to them the initial weak syllable is just as unimportant as an up-beat (auftakt, mesure d'attaque) is in music.

But is such an up-beat (a note before the first bar begins) really unimportant in music? I have taken a number of music books at random and counted the pieces in which such an up-beat occurs; I found that it was less frequent in pieces with a slow movement (largo, grave, adagio, andante) than in those

with a quick movement (*allegro*, *allegretto*, *rondo*, *presto*, *prestissimo*, *vivace*):

Slow	Beethoven	Schubert	Schumann	Sum
with up-beat	5	1	5	11
without up-beat	17	7	7	31
Quick				
with up-beat	31	14	12	57
without up-beat	19	11	10	40

This agrees with the general impression of verse rhythms: a sequence *didúm didúm didúm . . .* tends to move more rapidly than *dúmda dúmda dúmda . . .* I think this depends on a deeply rooted psychological tendency: there is a universal inclination to hurry up to a summit, but once the top is reached one may linger in the descent. This is shown linguistically within each syllable: consonants before the summit of sonority (which in most cases is a vowel) are nearly always short, while consonants after the summit are very often long; cp. thus the two *n*'s of *nun*, the two *t*'s of *tot*, the two *m*'s of *member*. Words of the type 43 with long second syllable are frequent: *football*, *folklore*, *cornfield*, *therefore*, while corresponding words with 34 are rare: they tend to become 24 or even 14: *throughout*, *therein*, *austere*, *naïve*, *Louise*, *forgive*—with more or less distinct shortening of the vowel.

In this connexion it is perhaps also worth calling attention to the following fact. As a stressed syllable tends, other things being equal, to be pronounced with higher pitch than weak syllables, a purely "iambic" line will tend towards a higher tone at the end, but according to general phonetic laws this is a sign that something more is to be expected. Consequently it is in iambic verses easy to knit line to line in natural continuation.⁷ Inversely the typical pitch movement of a "trochaic" line is towards a descent, which in each line acts as an indication of finality, of finish. If a continuation is wanted, the poet is therefore often obliged to repeat something—a feature which is highly characteristic of such a poem as *Hiawatha*, where each page offers examples like the following:

*Should you ask me, whence these stories?
Whence these legends and traditions,
With the odours of the forest,
With the dew and damp of meadows,
With the curling smoke of wigwams,
With the rushing of great rivers,
With their frequent repetitions, (N.B.)*

And their wild reverberations,
 As of thunder in the mountains?
I should answer, I should tell you,
From the . . . etc. (From the 6 times.)
Should you ask where Nawadaha
Found these songs, so wild and wayward,
Found these legends and traditions,
I should answer, I should tell you
*In the . . . (In the 4 times.)*⁸

These, then, seem to be the distinctive features of the two types of metre: rapidity, ease of going on from line to line without a break on the one hand, and on the other slowness, heaviness, a feeling of finality at the end of each line, hence sometimes fatiguing repetitions. Tennyson utilized this contrast in a masterly way in *The Lady of Shalott*, where the greater part of the poem is rising, but where a falling rhythm winds up the whole in the description of her sad swan-song:

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
 Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
 Till her blood was frozen slowly,
 And her eyes were darkened wholly,
 Turned to tower'd Camelot.

References for the lines quoted.

Sh = Shakespeare. The titles of plays indicated as in A. Schmidt's Shakespeare-Lexicon. Numbers of act, scene, and line as in the Globe edition.

PL = Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as in Beeching's reprint of the original edition of 1667.

Ø = Øhlenschläger, *Axel og Valborg*, number of page according to A. Boysen's edition of *Poetiske skrifter i udvalg*, III, 1896.

P-M = Paludan-Müller, *Adam Homo*, Anden deel, 1849.

H = Hertz, *Kong Renés datter*, 7de opl., 1893.

G = Goethe, *Iphigenie auf Tauris*. Number of act and line according to *Sämtliche werke XI* in Cotta's *Bibl. d. weltlitt.*

1. 1. Tro. I, 1. 54. — 2, 3. Hml. I. 3. 68, 69. — 4. G I. 115. — 5. G I. 226.

2. 1. Mcb. V. 5. 27. — 2. R3 I. 3. 185. — 3. G I. 27.

5. 1. As II. 3. 63. — 2. Mids. I. 1. 134. — 3. Hml. I. 2. 129. — 4. Lr. III. 7. 31. — 5.

Wordsw. Tint. Abb. — 6. Tennyson, En. Arden 5. — 7. G III. 317.

6. 1. Lr. V. 3. 260.

9. 1. Tro. I. 1. 54. — 2. Pope.

10. 1. Mids. I. 1. 134. — 2. Hml. I. 4.2. — 3. Pope Ess. Crit. 347. — 4. Tennyson Ulysses. —

5. Pope. — 6. Rom. III. 5. 178. — 7. PL II. 621. — 8. The Ring and the Book I. 6.

11. 1. R3 II. 2. 17.

12. 1. P-M 21. — 2. Ø 8. — 3. Ø 23. — 4. G I. 329. — 5. G I. 483. — 6. G III. 242. — 7.

Caes. I. 2. 193. — 8. R3 I. 1. 9. — 9. ib. II. 1. 82.

13. 1. H4A IV. 1. 134. — 2. *ib.* IV. 3. 31. — 3. *ib.* V. 2. 68. — 4. As I. 3. 129. — 5. R3 I. 3. 295. — 6. PL IX. 273. — 7. *ib.* IX. 403. — 8. Ø 7. — 9. Ø 21.
14. 1. R3 I. 3. 274. — 2. *ib.* I. 3. 209. — 3. *ib.* I. 3. 255. — 4. *ib.* II. 2. 17. — 5. *ib.* II. 1. 62. — 6. Ø 17. — 7. H 95. — 8. Ø. Hakon Jarl. — 9. G I. 106. — 10. G III. 71. — 11. R3 I. 2. 245. — 12. Caes. III. 2. 78. — 13. R3 I. 3. 164. — 14. P-M 40. — 15. G I. 332.
15. 1. R3 I. 3. 204. — 2. John III. 4. 93. — 3. R3 II. 1. 138. — 4. *ib.* II. 2. 81. — 5. As II. 1. 12. — 6. *ib.* I. 3. 121. — 7. *ib.* II. 1. 39. — 8. P-M 12. — 9. Ø 27. — 10. G I. 93. — 11. G I. 351. — 12. R3 I. 3. 272. — 13. Ø 8. — 14. G I. 463.
16. 1. R3 I. 1. 161. — 2. *ib.* I. 2. 148. — 3. *ib.* I. 2. 149. — 4. *ib.* I. 3. 185. — 5. Ø 15. — 6. Ø 8.
18. 1. Wint. III. 1. 10.
19. 1. Mids. I. 1. 5. — 2. John V. 7. 113. — 3. Mids. III. 2. 20. — 4. R3 I. 2. 177. — 5. The Ring and the Book I. 14. — 6. *ib.* I. 47. — 7. *ib.* I. 608-9.
21. 1. PL VIII. 499. — 2. As II. 1. 36. — 3. Tw. II. 4. 16. — 4. *ib.* II. 4. 46. — 5. R3 I. 1. 4. — 6. *ib.* I. 1. 72. — 7. *ib.* II. 2. 97. — 8. Merch. I. 3. 48. — 9. *ib.* I. 3. 73. — 10. *ib.* IV. 1. 177. — 11. Shelley Prom. I. 659. — 12. Mids. II. 1. 94. — 13. Merch. II. 9. 59.
22. Hml V. 2. 352. — *ib.* IV. 7. 80.
23. 1. Lr. V. 3. 317. — 2. Rom. III. 5. 178. — 3. R3 III. 4. 11.

POSTSCRIPT

During the more than thirty years since this paper was first written, I have read many books and papers on metre, but have found nothing to shake my belief in the essential truth of my views, though I have often had occasion to regret that I wrote my paper in Danish and buried it in a place where fellow metrists in other countries were not likely to discover it.

If E. A. Sonnenschein had been alive, I should probably have written some pages in refutation of much in his book *What is Rhythm?* (Oxford, 1925). Now I shall content myself with pointing out how his inclination to find classical metres in English and to attach decisive importance to quantity leads him to such unnatural scannings of perfectly regular lines as

The véry spírít of Plantágenèt
| u u u | ^ u u | ^ o | ^ — | u u |

The first foot is an iambus, but as such should contain a long syllable; now both *e* and *r* in *very* are known to Sonnenschein as short; he therefore takes *y* as part of a trisyllabic foot, but it must at the same time be the “fall” of the next foot (his mark for the “protraction” which makes this possible is \circ); the second iambus again has as its “rise” the two short syllables *spírít*, of which the second again is protracted to form the “fall” of the third foot; but *of* “does not fill up the time of the rise completely, unless it receives a metrical ictus, which would be accompanied by lengthening”—this is marked \circ . In a similar way are treated

O pítý, pítý, géntle héaven, pítý!
 | ~ u u | ^ u u | ^ ~ | u u u | ^ u u | ^

and the shorter

Apollo's summer look

| u u u : u u u | ^ ~ | (p. 158-59).

We get rid of all such pieces of artificiality by simply admitting that short syllables like *ver-*, *spir-*, *pit-*, *-pol-*, *sum-* are just as susceptible of verse ictus as long ones.

Unfortunately experimental phonetics gives us very little help in these matters. Sonnenschein and others have used the kymograph for metric purposes, and "the kymograph cannot lie" (Sonnenschein, p. 33): but neither can it tell us anything of what really matters, namely stress, however good it is for length of sounds. The experimentalist Panconcelli-Calzia even goes so far as to deny the reality of syllables, and Scripture finds in his instruments nothing corresponding to the five beats of a blank verse line. So I am afraid poets and metrists must go on depending on their ears only.

English prosodists are apt to forget that the number of syllables is often subject to reduction in cases like *general*, *murderous*, *separately*, *desperate*; compare the treatment of *garden* + *er*, of *person* + *-al* and of *noble* + *ly* as disyllabic *gardener*, *personal*, *nobly*, and the change of syllabic *i* before another vowel to non-syllabic [j] as in *Bohemia*, *cordial*, *immediate*, *opinion*, etc., in which Shakespeare and others have sometimes a full vowel, sometimes syllable reduction, the former chiefly at the end of a line, where it is perfectly natural to slow down the speed of pronunciation. Compare the two lines (Ro II. 2. 4 and 7) in which *envious* is first two and then three syllables:

Arise faire Sun and kill the envious Moone . . .
 Be not her maid since she is envious.

Similarly *many a*, *many and*, *worthy a*, *merry as*, etc., occur in Shakespeare and later poets as two syllables in conformity with a natural everyday pronunciation (my *Modern English Grammar*, I, 278).

I must finally remark that the whole of my paper concerns one type of (modern) metre only, and that there are other types, based wholly or partially on other principles, thus classical Greek and Latin verse. On medieval and to some extent modern versification of a different type much light is shed in various papers by William Ellery Leonard (himself a poet as well as a metrist): "Beowulf and the Nibelungen Couplet"; "The Scansion of Middle English Alliterative Verse" (both in *University of Wisconsin Studies in Language*

and Literature, 1918 and 1920), "The Recovery of the Metre of the *Cid*" (*PMLA*, 1931) and "Four Footnotes to Papers on Germanic Metrics" (in *Studies in Honor of F. Klaeber*, 1929).

NOTES

¹The places from which quotations are taken will be indicated at the end of the paper. Quotations from Shakespeare are given in the spelling of the 1623 folio, except that sometimes an apostrophe is substituted for a mute *e*, and that the modern distinction of *u* and *v*, and *i* and *j* is carried through.

²"Their attractiveness may be due precisely to the fact that the accent of the first foot comes as a surprise to the reader", Sonnenschein, *What Is Rhythm?* (Oxford, 1925), p. 105.

³*Der Vers in Shakespeares Dramen* (Strassburg: Quellen und Forschungen, 1888), 61, p. 79, cf. 77. Only "worttrochäen" are here numbered, not "satztrochäen".

⁴A corresponding interpretation of the metre of Shakespeare's *Lucrece* (1611 and 1612) is found in A. P. van Dam, *W. Shakespeare, Prosody and Text* (Leyden 1900), p. 206.

⁵But it is necessary to read these writers with a critical mind, for very often lines are given as containing such supernumerary syllables which are perfectly regular in Shakespeare's pronunciation, e.g.

I am more an antique Roman than a Dane (I am = I'm).

The light and careless livery that it wears (livery = livry).

⁶Folio: Or I of his, my Lord.

⁷Two rimed lines in succession will, however, produce the impression of finish—a feature that is often found in the Elizabethan drama, more particularly when a scene or a speech ends with a sententious saying.

⁸These two things, a trochaic metre and constant repetition, are found together in Finnish popular poetry, which Longfellow imitated.

²
" *The Structure
of Verse* "

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*Edited with an Introduction
and Commentary by*
HARVEY GROSS

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